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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001191

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TAGS: [IR](#) [AF](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: 2008 CZECH FOREIGN DEPLOYMENT BILL

REF: A. PRAGUE 1177
[1](#)B. PRAGUE 1144

Classified By: POL-ECON Counselor M. Dodman for reasons 1.4 b+d.

1.(C) Summary and Comment: On October 22, the Czech Government approved a proposal for the Czech military's foreign operations in 2008. According to the decision, the Government will seek parliamentary approval for the deployment of up to 415 soldiers to Afghanistan in 2008, an increase from this year's 224. The bulk of these troops, 180, will be deployed as part of the new Czech PRT based in Logar, Afghanistan (Ref A). The document also proposes sending 80 troops to help the Dutch in Uruzgan by mid-year. The Czechs see the Logar PRT and helping the Dutch as a symbol of their commitment to NATO and a way to concentrate their limited defense resources. However, the Government's 2008 proposal cuts the number of Czech troops to be deployed in Iraq from 100 to 20 by July 1, 2008. Although the debate will be more contentious than previous years, we expect the Parliament to approve the foreign deployments bill by the end of December [1](#)2007. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (C) On October 22, the Czech Government approved the MOD's draft foreign deployment plans for CY 2008. The plan requires approval of parliament. In addition to 550 troops planned to continue Czech operations in Kosovo, 5 soldiers for Bosnia and Herzegovina (a mission that the Czechs will phase out in 2008), and 3 members of the armed forces for the EU Mission in Darfur, the 2008 plan includes the following for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iraq

[1](#)3. (C) The Government intends to maintain the ceiling of 100 troops in Iraq next year. However, the report approved by the government makes clear that the Czechs plan to reduce the actual number of forces in Iraq during the year, with a view to having only 20 troops left in Iraq by July 1, 2008; rather than continue their current force protection mission, the Czechs intend that their future effort in Iraq will involve training the Iraqi Army (which was their focus prior to this year). It is not certain what motivated the planned drawdown in Iraq; our British colleagues report they were also surprised by the decision. In recent meetings with senior Czech officials, the commitment was made to maintain the 100-man ceiling. Only a few weeks ago, during DASD Cagan's visit, the MoD even indicated they might raise that number to 120 (Ref B). However, we have heard grumbling from Czech about being essentially "rent-a-cops" or "gate keepers" for the British garrison in Basra, who indicated that it could be hard to win parliamentary approval for such a mission, particularly from the Greens. Apparently, the final decision on the Iraq number was made only on the eve of last week's cabinet meeting. (Comment: the Czechs intend to discuss the size and shape of next year's Iraq deployment during this

week's coalition meeting in Bahrain.)

Afghanistan

¶4. (C) The planned ceiling for troops in Afghanistan next year will jump by 85% to 415 soldiers. The Czechs are committing a total of 180 soldiers to the new Czech PRT in Logar Province (ref A). Approximately 120 soldiers will support combined efforts at the Kabul International Airport, including extending the deployment of their 90-person military field hospital, and adding an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) to work with the Afghanistan National Air Corps, helicopter unit. The Czechs will continue to support British Forces in Helmand with 35 special military police. Finally, as a result of request from the U.S. and the Dutch, the Czech Government proposes sending 80 soldiers to help the Dutch in Uruzgan Province in the second half of ¶2008. The government decision document also talks about a number of possible future deployments in Afghanistan. The proposal states that the successful deployment of the Czech PRT could lead to the establishment of second OMLT (in Logar) to help train and assist Afghanistan National Army and National Police. In addition, the Czechs may seek to deploy the 601 Special Forces Group to Afghanistan, but only under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom. The Czechs have been told repeatedly that this is unlikely, as coalition forces are now being deployed under ISAF.

Next steps

¶5. (C) The deployment bill now goes before the parliament. While deployments have not been controversial in recent years (in part because, when it was in opposition, the now-governing ODS generally supported the government's

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bills), we expect a longer debate this year for several reasons. First, the opposition Social Democrats are unlikely to play a constructive role. Second, the Logar PRT is a major new commitment, which will receive considerable scrutiny, as will the Uruzgan deployment, especially because some parliamentarians consider the Czech Army as poorly equipped for these more dangerous missions. And finally, the Kosovo deployment -- which to date has not been controversial -- could be caught up in debate over a possible Kosovo declaration of independence in December. In the end we expect the bill will be approved largely as proposed. But it may require some effort by the USG, in particular to make clear our level of support for the new Logar PRT.
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